



July 7, 2006

<b><i>NOAA Gulf of Mexico News</i></b> .....	<b>3</b>
NOAA Issues Service Assessment Report on Hurricane Katrina .....	3
NOAA'S Offshore Aquaculture Activities: The New Frontier .....	4
Estuaries.gov is a Bridge Top Pick.....	4
OCRM Partners to Revitalize Louisiana Ports.....	4
NOAA Supports Texas Statewide Sea-grass Monitoring Program .....	5
<b><i>In the Gulf States</i></b> .....	<b>5</b>
Auburn's Landscape Architecture Studio Class and Public Water Access .....	5
U.S. District Court Grants Florida's Motion .....	6
Louisiana's Coastal Protection & Restoration Authority's Integrated Planning Team Announces Newsletter Regarding the State's Master Planning Efforts for Coastal Protection .....	6
Production of Wind Energy in Louisiana.....	7
LRA Begins Distributing Pattern Books .....	7
Aquaculture Block Grants Available to Louisiana Producers .....	8
Beach Restoration: Keeping Sand Where it Belongs .....	9
Governor Barbour: State Will Pay 90 Percent of Non-Federal Share of Debris Removal Costs .	10
Texas Land Office Creates a New Tool to Help Oil and Gas Companies with Exploration Research .....	10
Record Sea Turtle Release Marks Kemp's Ridley Comeback .....	11
<b><i>Other News</i></b> .....	<b>12</b>
President Bush Extends 100 Percent Pay for Marine Debris Removal .....	12
Louisiana Communities Receive More Than \$29 Million for Public Assistance Projects .....	12
Overfishing Among Threats to Ecosystems .....	13
<b><i>Grant Opportunities</i></b> .....	<b>14</b>
Gulf of Mexico Alliance Regional Partnership Request for Proposals-Deadline Extended .....	14

<b>Gulf of Mexico Community-based Restoration Partnership Request for Preproposals.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>NOAA’s Marine Debris Grant Initiative.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b><i>Energy</i>.....</b>	<b><i>16</i></b>
<b>U.S. House Votes to Lift Offshore Oil Drilling Ban.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Louisiana Governor Objects to OCS Lease Sale .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Governor’s Office Statement on Discussions with the U.S. Minerals Management Service .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Draft Environmental Impact Statement on Calhoun LNG Project.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b><i>Training and Conferences</i> .....</b>	<b><i>18</i></b>
<b>Alabama Mississippi Bays and Bayous Symposium- Register Online.....</b>	<b>18</b>

# NOAA Gulf of Mexico News

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## **NOAA Issues Service Assessment Report on Hurricane Katrina**

*Evaluation Highlights Agency Successes & Recommends Improvements*

NOAA's National Weather Service has released an internal evaluation of its operations during Hurricane Katrina. Service assessments are done routinely following major weather events and include input from government agencies, emergency managers, media, and the public. NOAA's National Hurricane Center consistently projected for more than two days in advance that Katrina would strike southeast Louisiana as a "major" hurricane and later issued hurricane watches and warnings with lead times of 44 and 32 hours, respectively — an extra eight hours beyond when such alerts are typically issued.

"The accurate forecasts provided for extended warning times," said Brig. Gen. David L. Johnson, U.S. Air Force (Ret.), director of NOAA's National Weather Service. "Our ability to identify where a major hurricane would hit the Gulf Coast was among the actions that saved countless lives." Katrina first crossed the U.S. coast as a Category 1 hurricane near the border of Broward and Miami-Dade counties in Florida on August 25. Katrina was a Category 3 hurricane with top winds of 125 mph during its second landfall in Buras, La., on August 29, and soon thereafter made its final landfall near the border of Louisiana and Mississippi.

Service assessments are a valuable contribution to the ongoing efforts to improve the timeliness and effectiveness of National Weather Service products and services. "The Hurricane Katrina assessment highlights the best practices while recommending improvements that will allow the National Weather Service to better serve the American public in effort to protect life and property," added Johnson. Thirteen "best practices" were identified in the Katrina assessment, among them:

- Max Mayfield, director of NOAA's National Hurricane Center, contacting the governors of Louisiana and Mississippi, the mayor of New Orleans, and the Alabama Emergency Management Agency to emphasize the severity of Katrina.
- The National Weather Service forecast office in Slidell, La., which serves New Orleans, issuing vividly worded statements that explicitly described the impending catastrophic damage expected from Katrina.
- Deploying incident meteorologists to Louisiana in the aftermath of Katrina to fill gaps in the weather observation network created by the hurricane.

Recommendations also were cited in the assessment and are currently being addressed by NOAA's National Weather Service. They include:

- Provide all appropriate weather forecast offices with standard hurricane impact statement templates, similar to those issued by the forecast office in Slidell, La.
- Evaluate current telecommunications networks for potential single points of failure and developing alternate networks to better support field office backup operations.

- Establish alternative communications systems for field offices to communicate with other National Weather Service offices and emergency officials.

The full NOAA Hurricane Katrina Assessment may be found at:

<http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/assessments/>

## ***NOAA'S Offshore Aquaculture Activities: The New Frontier***

NOAA's effort to increase domestic seafood production through aquaculture gained tremendous momentum recently, when the president emphasized the need for sustainable aquaculture in the United States, and urged Congress to move ahead on the National Offshore Aquaculture Act (S. 1195). In his June 15 remarks at the White House announcing the designation of the Northwest Hawaiian Islands as a National Monument, the president said, "Congress needs to move forward with my administration's plan to build a well-managed system of offshore aquaculture ... And when we get this right, these farmed fish can provide a healthy source of food and reduce pressure on the ocean ecosystems." The president's focus on sustainable fisheries and aquaculture as part of that announcement provided a timely and significant boost for the offshore bill, which calls for the creation of a regulatory framework for aquaculture in federal waters. NOAA believes that carefully sited, regulated and monitored finfish and shellfish operations in U.S. federal waters can be an effective way to reduce our nation's growing dependence on seafood imports, provide jobs for economically depressed coastal communities and increase regional food supply and security. [Full Story Here](#).

## ***Estuaries.gov is a Bridge Top Pick***

The Bridge (<http://www.marine-ed.org/bridge>), a popular collection of the best online marine education materials, selected NOAA's [www.estuaries.gov](http://www.estuaries.gov) as June's TROLL (Teacher Reviewer of On-Line Learning) Top Pick. The review begins, "Are you land locked? Would you like to take your students to the coast? You too can help celebrate National Estuary Day (9/30/06) with a virtual interactive field trip. Site includes lesson plans." At the Bridge, educators can find useful information on global, national, and regional marine science topics, and researchers can find contact points for educational outreach. The website is supported by the National Sea Grant Office, the National Oceanographic Partnership Program, and the National Marine Educators Association. For more information, contact Atziri Ibanez ([Atziri.Ibanez@noaa.gov](mailto:Atziri.Ibanez@noaa.gov)).

## ***OCRM Partners to Revitalize Louisiana Ports***

On June 28, staff from the Office of Coastal and Ocean Resource Management (OCRM) met with the Economic Development Administration (EDA) to discuss partnership opportunities under the Southern Louisiana Portfields Initiative. The initiative is a NOAA-led interagency effort focused on port revitalization. EDA is already working with a number of ports in Louisiana and is particularly interesting in fostering regional plans for port development. NOAA, EDA and other Portfields partners will work with six Louisiana ports to identify priority projects to implement in the coming months. For more information, contact Kenneth Walker ([Kenneth.Walker@noaa.gov](mailto:Kenneth.Walker@noaa.gov)).

## **NOAA Supports Texas Statewide Sea-grass Monitoring Program**

NOAA is working with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Texas A&M University's Center for Coastal Studies to support the statewide sea-grass monitoring program. Existing digital-camera imagery, originally collected for the National Agriculture Imagery Program, is being used to create benthic habitat maps. The mapping process will use semi-automated methods and will be completed by private industry. Texas will use the maps to help locate, monitor, and protect sea-grass beds. Phase I of the project covers Corpus Christi Bay, Redfish Bay, Upper Laguna Madre, Baffin Bay, and Aransas and Copano Bays (which include the new Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve). The team recently collected more than 400 field signature points to assist in the spectral discrimination of algae, sea grasses, and oyster reefs. For more information, contact Bill Stevenson ([Bill.Stevenson@noaa.gov](mailto:Bill.Stevenson@noaa.gov)).

## **In the Gulf States**

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### ***Auburn's Landscape Architecture Studio Class and Public Water Access***

*Dauphin Island Sea Lab, Tidings June 2006, Vol. 17, No. 2*

The challenges of public access to the water are rising with demands for more boat ramps and fishing locales. Last year, various state agencies collaborated on a survey of public opinion of these challenges, and used the results to design new access options in the area south of Bayfront Park to, and including, Dauphin Island.

Charlene LeBleu, Assistant Professor of Community Planning and Landscape Architecture at Auburn University, and her landscape architecture class, presented the results of the water user survey, an overview of the current challenges, and design options for improved public access. Commentary was sought from the audience of boaters, commercial and recreational fishing interests, oyster fishing interests, and others.

"This is an exciting process for all users of the water, whether you're an oysterman, a boater, or a family hoping to find a beach on the way to Dauphin Island," said Dr. George Crozier, Executive Director of the Dauphin Island Sea Lab. "The busiest boat ramp in Alabama is at the east end of the island – trailer rage has not yet escalated to violence but local fishermen have told me that they'd never go back to the island because of the congestion."

Participating agencies in this project are: Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, State Lands Division; Auburn University, College of Architecture, Design and Construction; Dauphin Island Sea Lab; Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium; and the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program.

## ***U.S. District Court Grants Florida's Motion***

Mobile, AL - Wednesday, June 21, 2006 Florida filed a motion for a temporary restraining order (TRO) in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Alabama, before Judge Karon Bowdre. In its motion for TRO, Florida asked the Court to Compel the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to maintain releases of 8,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) from Jim Woodruff Lock and Dam at Lake Seminole from June 21 until the Corps completes its ongoing for Section 7 consultation under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Today the Court granted Florida's motion and ordered the Corps to "immediately maintain releases of 8,000 cfs from the Jim Woodruff Lock and Dam for ten days from the date of this Order, unless future Orders by this court dictate otherwise." A hearing is set for Friday, June 23 on whether a preliminary injunction is warranted. Upon receipt of the Court's Order, the Corps began making the necessary releases from the projects on the ACF to provide the necessary 8,000 cfs flow from the Jim Woodruff Lock and Dam. Various releases will occur at each of the three Corps projects on the ACF (Buford Dam at Lake Lanier, West Point Lock and Dam at West Point Lake, and Walter F. George Lock and Dam, Lake Walter F. George) to collectively provide the flows necessary for the 8,000 cfs at Jim Woodruff. No one project on the ACF will be used to meet the flow requirements all will contribute to keep the system in balance.

## ***Louisiana's Coastal Protection & Restoration Authority's Integrated Planning Team Announces Newsletter Regarding the State's Master Planning Efforts for Coastal Protection***

Louisiana's Coastal Protection & Restoration Authority's Integrated Planning Team announces newsletter regarding the State's master planning efforts for coastal protection. Because of the devastation of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the Louisiana Legislature, through Act 8 of the First Extraordinary Session of 2005, restructured the State's Wetland Conservation and Restoration Authority, to form the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA). This act expanded the membership, duties, and responsibilities and charged it to develop and implement a comprehensive coastal protection plan, including both a master plan and annual plans.

As charged by Act 8, the CPRA also established an Integrated Planning Team (IPT) to jointly coordinate development of the master plan with state and federal agencies, as well as political subdivisions (including levee districts). The IPT consists of senior staff from DNR and DOTD. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New Orleans District, has also assigned a senior staff person to the team as a liaison.

The first newsletter of the CPRA Integrated Planning Team, including details on the purpose of the CPRA IPT and news of its planning activities is available at

[http://lacoast.gov/news/press/2006-07-07/CPRA\\_Newsletter\\_vol\\_1\\_issue\\_1.pdf](http://lacoast.gov/news/press/2006-07-07/CPRA_Newsletter_vol_1_issue_1.pdf)

If you would like to receive further information regarding the State's planning effort to integrate hurricane protection and coastal restoration, you may subscribe to this newsletter through the CPRA IPT website at

<http://www.louisianacoastalplanning.org>

The CPRA IPT newsletters, as well as other relevant documents may be downloaded from this web page:

<http://www.louisianacoastalplanning.org/pubs.html>

## ***Production of Wind Energy in Louisiana***

The Louisiana Department of Natural Resources will conduct a public meeting at **10:00 a.m. Monday July 17, 2006** in the LaBelle Room on the first floor of the LaSalle Building at 617 North 3rd Street, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, for the purpose of receiving comments on the development of regulations prior to beginning the formal rulemaking process. The Department of Natural Resources is seeking comments from industry, the general public, special interest groups, and local, state and federal agencies.

Act 481, Regular Session, 2005, authorized the Department of Natural Resources to lease state lands for the exploration, development, and production of energy from wind and provided that the Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources shall promulgate rules and regulations necessary to accomplish the intent of the legislation.

Oral and written comments will be accepted at the public meeting. Correspondence or requests for additional information should be directed to:

Monique M. Edwards, Executive Counsel  
Office of the Secretary, Department of Natural Resources  
PO Box 94396  
Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9396  
(225) 342-2614; (225) 342-2707 Fax

## ***LRA Begins Distributing Pattern Books***

Rebuilding Guides will be Available to Louisiana Residents Statewide

BATON ROUGE, La. (July 6, 2006) -- The Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA)'s Louisiana Speaks initiative has partnered with retailers across the state to distribute the Louisiana Pattern Book, a reference guide of building designs and materials that will enable people to rebuild using more storm-resistant materials while maintaining the architectural character of South Louisiana.

Beginning next week, Pattern Books will be available for free at select home improvement stores throughout Louisiana. A complete list of distribution centers and electronic copies of the Pattern Book is available online at [www.louisianaspeaks.org](http://www.louisianaspeaks.org). To download the book, click [here](#). "Louisiana residents need the tools to rebuild their homes and their lives," said Donna Fraiche, LRA Board Member and Long Term Community Planning Task Force Chair. "The LRA's Louisiana Speaks Pattern Book will guide Louisianans toward rebuilding their homes safer, stronger and smarter."

Through technical workshops and community forums led by Ray Gindroz of Urban Design Associates (UDA), the LRA worked with citizens, homebuilders, architects and developers to create the Pattern Book. "The Louisiana Speaks Pattern Book has been designed to provide tools for building new homes and renovating those damaged by the storms," said Ray Gindroz of UDA. "It continues the tradition of Pattern Books which our grandfathers and grandmothers used to build our most loved communities and neighborhoods."

Publication of the Pattern Book was made possible by a grant from the Fannie Mae Foundation. "The Louisiana Speaks Pattern Book is not only a beautiful tribute to Louisiana's rich and wonderful architecture, but a practical guide to aid in the rebuilding of those Louisiana communities that suffered devastation," said Stacey D. Stewart, president and CEO, Fannie Mae Foundation. "We believe it will be a valuable tool that will help communities rebuild in a time-honored fashion that embraces Louisiana's irreplaceable and unique architectural history."



Louisiana Speaks is the long-term community planning initiative of the LRA designed to develop a sustainable long-term vision for South Louisiana. In late June, the LRA's Louisiana Speaks initiative launched the long-range regional planning process with regional planner, Calthorpe Associates. In conjunction with the launch of the regional planning process, the first edition of the LRA's newsletter titled, "Creating a Regional Vision for South Louisiana" will also be available to the public in retail stores and coffee shops across the southern region. The newsletter addresses the results of the 2006 Recovery Survey conducted by Collective Strength and the planning process for rebuilding the hurricane-affected region of South Louisiana. For more information about the LRA's long-term community planning efforts and to read the newsletter, visit [www.louisianaspeaks.org](http://www.louisianaspeaks.org).

## ***Aquaculture Block Grants Available to Louisiana Producers***

**(June 30, 2006)** Federal disaster relief money is working its way to aquaculture producers in Louisiana in the form of the Aquaculture Block Grant Program. Commissioner of Agriculture and Forestry Bob Odom said \$4.5 million in long-awaited federal aid is now available to state aquaculture producers adversely affected by last year's brutal hurricanes. The Louisiana Aquaculture Block Grant Program funds were made available to the state from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The grants will be administered by the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry and the USDA's Farm Services Agency.

At a meeting held at the LSU AgCenter's Cooperative Extension Service office in Abbeville on June 29, Roy Johnson, LDAF market development director, explained the application process to more than 50 crawfish producers in attendance. Johnson said that any Louisiana aquaculture producer who was engaged in the commercial production, raising, managing or harvesting of aquatic livestock under controlled circumstances on Aug. 29, 2005, the day Katrina hit, could be eligible for the grant money. That includes commercial catfish farmers as well as crawfish, reptiles, baitfish and other finfish growers.

On the application, producers must indicate damages and losses that were related to either Hurricane Katrina or Rita. Records or other supporting documentation needs to be submitted with the application along with an FSA farm number and an IRS W-9 form. The application must also be notarized. These requirements were made to insure that these grants go to legitimate commercial producers who were impacted by the storms, Johnson said.

The application period for producers in the Gulf Opportunity (GO) Zone, where losses were the greatest, is from June 30 through July 31. The application process for all other Louisiana aquaculture producers runs from July 31 through August 31.

Several producer organizations, including the Louisiana Crawfish Farmers Association, the Louisiana Alligator Farmers and Ranchers Association, the Louisiana Cattish Farmers Association and the Louisiana Farm Bureau, have worked cooperatively to inform Congress and the USDA of the importance of aquaculture to Louisiana and the economic losses caused by the storms. This is the first time that crawfish have been recognized in any kind of disaster relief by the federal government, according to Stephen Minvielle, past president of the crawfish association. The same can be said for the other commodities, too. Applications as well as instructions for filing can be found on the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry Web site at [www.ldaf.state.la.us](http://www.ldaf.state.la.us), or by calling 225-922-1280.



## ***Beach Restoration: Keeping Sand Where it Belongs***

Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium Seabriefs: [www.masgc.org/seabriefs.html](http://www.masgc.org/seabriefs.html)

A long-running project conducted by two Mississippi State University professors and partially funded by MASGC has resulted in a beach landscape that keeps the sand on the beach and off the roadway along the Mississippi Gulf Coast in Biloxi where removal of wind-blown sand is paid for by the City of Biloxi. The Natural Beach Restoration Study, conceived in 1982 by MSU landscape architecture students, continues to thrive in spite of Hurricane Katrina's destructive storm surge last August. Its ongoing success is partly due to two MASGC program development grants totaling \$33,390. Other partner contributors include the Biloxi Chamber of Commerce and the Harrison County Board of Supervisors.

The results show great promise. "Through our 12 years of studies we have developed a 3-acre beach landscape that does not allow sand to blow onto U.S. Highway 90," said Pete Melby, a landscape architect with the Center for Sustainable Design who is overseeing the project with Dr. Thomas Cathcart, an agriculture and biological engineering professor.

"Through establishment of native beach and upper beach landscape plantings and development of a new way of managing the beach, we are growing the beach both vertically and horizontally. Native trees, shrubs, and grasses enhance the accretion of sand. In fact, after each tropical storm and hurricane, the beach grew several feet in vertical elevation. The only exception was Hurricane Katrina and the beach grew greater than 5 feet in elevation from the storm surge." During post-Katrina cleanup, that level of sand which spilled over onto U.S. 90 and blocked the highway, along with a part of beach maritime forest landscape established during the restoration process, was removed by emergency military and transportation department efforts.

"We had a major die-off of the emergent vegetation, not because it was uprooted, but because the photosynthetically active abovesediment parts were sheared off," said Dr. Cathcart. "This is typical of storms that occur in late summer and early fall. We have one section, however, that is coming back strongly. The dune grass was covered by the additional sand and is making a comeback." Some trees, shrubs, and beach grasses, along with some emergent grasses, survived Katrina. Beach edge erosion on the 1,000-foot-long site did not occur though salt levels in the Mississippi Sound were and are still very high—at levels normally found beyond the barrier islands.

"We are growing the beach southward with salt marshes," said Melby. "By utilizing natural processes and the creation of a wider beach, we believe we can grow dunes that will be taller and stronger and that will contribute to coastal edge protection. In fact, we are convinced we are working toward creation of a national coastal defense landscape that includes aggressive native plant establishment and native ecosystem creation, and a way of management that is in harmony with natural cycles and processes affecting the beach and coastal edge."

Through trial and error, Dr. Cathcart and Melby have learned how to effectively work to enhance beach and maritime forest ecosystems for the benefit of human and wildlife development. "Our research has slowly revealed these processes that have to be relied upon," said Melby. "Creation of a national coastal defense landscape along our coastal edges will provide a variety of great advantages to people and nature."

## **Governor Barbour: State Will Pay 90 Percent of Non-Federal Share of Debris Removal Costs**

(Jackson, Mississippi) – Starting Saturday, the state will pay 90 percent of non-federal costs for removal of dry debris remaining in areas stricken by Hurricane Katrina, Governor Haley Barbour announced today. Traditionally, the state of Mississippi and local governments have split the non-federal share of debris removal costs on a 50/50 basis. Governor Barbour estimated his decision would save local governments about \$4 million based on the amount of dry debris remaining.

“The unprecedented destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina has led to unprecedented decisions on such critical activities as debris removal,” Governor Barbour said.

He noted that President Bush approved four extensions of 100 percent federal payment for debris removal and authorized a 90/10 federal/non-federal split starting July 1, instead of the more typical 75/25 split at this point into a disaster recovery. The President also authorized debris removal from private property and announced the federal government will pay 100 percent of costs to remove wet debris from the Mississippi Sound through May 15, 2007.

“Even though President Bush has generously reduced the non-federal cost-share, most of the remaining debris is in jurisdictions most impacted by lost tax revenue,” Governor Barbour said. “I hope substantially reducing the required local share will help them finish debris removal as quickly as possible and accelerate rebuilding.” When all federal/non-federal cost sharing for debris removal is considered, the federal government will pay 90 percent, the state will pay 9 percent and local governments will pay 1 percent.

## **Texas Land Office Creates a New Tool to Help Oil and Gas Companies with Exploration Research**

*Land Office releases online GIS mapping application to assist oil and gas execs around the world*

AUSTIN — Jerry Patterson, Commissioner of the Texas General Land Office, has brought millions of land grants, coastal leases and oil and gas leases to life via a 21<sup>st</sup> century, state-of-the-art, online mapping application. The Texas General Land Office Interactive Land/Lease Information System can be used by anyone with Internet access. The interactive tool lets genealogists look up family land grants online instead of driving to Austin to comb through original documents, which number in the millions. Employees at oil and gas companies across the nation can search for information on specific oil and gas leases with a few keystrokes. And in less than a minute, a graduate student in Lubbock can view original land grant information for William B. Travis thanks to this new online mapping application.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) was first used at the General Land Office in 1988 for surveying state lands and for legislative redistricting. Since then, GIS functions have expanded to include supporting lease sales, oil spill response, stewardship of coastal resources, land surveying and other business functions of the Land Office. Users of this new interactive tool can locate a specific oil and gas lease and get a detailed map of the surrounding area, down to a particular intersection.

“The GIS application will give historians a new way of researching Texas landmarks, land grants, oil and gas leases and census information by county,” Patterson said. “We are paving new ground here and that is something all Texans can be proud of.” To begin searching land transfers, oil and gas leases, coastal leases and other data, please visit <http://gisweb1.glo.state.tx.us/website/gisweb.cfm>.

## ***Record Sea Turtle Release Marks Kemp's Ridley Comeback***

TEPEHUAJES, Mexico — Mexican and U.S. scientists on June 28 marked the recovery of the Kemp's Ridley sea turtle here with the largest single-day turtle release since the binational recovery project began decades ago, helping close to 240,000 four-inch hatchlings wriggle across the sand and into the Gulf of Mexico. Even though sea turtle nestings on Texas and Mexico beaches have soared to record highs this year, scientists this week tempered jubilation with caution, saying current levels of funding and work must continue for the world's most endangered sea turtle to fully recover.

So far this year, close to 100 Kemp's Ridley sea turtles have come in to nest on Texas beaches, twice last year's number, vindicating decades of work by U.S. scientists to establish a secondary nesting location in Texas. But Mexico is still far and away the primary home for the species, with more than 11,000 nestings so far this year within the 125-kilometer stretch of beach where 90 percent of the world's Ridley population nests.

Today, a half dozen camps each summer now host dozens of biologists, patrol technicians, grad students and volunteers from both nations, who live in primitive conditions that are nonetheless far superior to earlier decades. Each day they patrol the beaches on All-Terrain Vehicles, looking for nesting females. When they find one, they carefully dig up the eggs and take them back to protected corrals at the camps. About 45 days later, the eggs hatch and teams take the hatchlings down to the shoreline at night and let them crawl the last few yards into the Gulf. In spite of the human helping hand, scientists estimate that less than one percent of the hatchlings survive to maturity.

For many years, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the USFWS have provided funding to help keep the Mexican camps staffed and running, realizing that if Ridleys were to survive in Texas and U.S. waters, the key was supporting the Mexico nesting beaches.

In 1995, a new and unexpected partner emerged on the scene. Dr. Pat Burchfield of the Gladys Porter Zoo had gone to speak at a Texas shrimp industry meeting. This intrigued Les Hodgson, co-owner of Marco Sales, a Brownsville shrimp wholesaler, and he began a crusade to involve commercial shrimp fishermen in the Ridley recovery. Shrimpers had been blamed as one reason for the turtle's decline, and in the 1990s they were required to start using Turtle Excluder devices, essentially holes in shrimp trawls (nets) that allow sea turtles to escape and avoid drowning.

Hodgson and others got U.S. shrimpers to buy into the project, including Wild American Shrimp, the marketing arm of the organization that represents shrimpers in eight southern U.S. states along the Gulf and the Atlantic. They approached their Mexican counterparts with the organization CANAINPES about working together. "They held their next meeting and came back and said only on one condition," Hodgson recalls. "And we said uh-oh what's that, and they said we want to be truly 50 percent partners with you. So together, the Mexican industry bought the property here at Tepehuajes, and between the fishermen from both countries, we spent about two months down here building the 12-bed facility for the biologists that run this camp." Tepehuajes is the second most important Ridley turtle nesting beach. The shrimpers, nonprofit environmental conservation groups and others also lobbied the U.S. government for continued funding in years when lean federal budgets threatened the project.

In 2000, the TPW Commission passed state regulations that set a seasonal commercial shrimp fishing closure from near Corpus Christi to the Mexican border, extending from the beach out to five nautical miles from December to mid-July. This was done to better manage the shrimp fishery, but it had the effect of protecting turtles during nesting season, which runs roughly May-July. By the early years of this

decade, turtle nestings in both nations had been steadily climbing for years, the fruit of many decades of sustained cooperative work.

In the last few years, the Mexican government, with funding and support from the shrimpers, has been working to involve the local people near the turtle beaches, many of whom lost their livelihoods when turtle egg sales were prohibited. The Tamaulipan governor's wife recently led an effort to bring artists and teachers to the small village near Tepehaujes, looking for a way to bring new tourist dollars tied to the sea turtles into the community. A commercial kiln was funded and today local men, women and children make ceramic sea turtle art objects that are sold at the Gladys Porter Zoo and other locations.

What will it take to declare the Ridley project a true success? The recovery plan approved by government agencies involved calls for a total of 10,000 nesting females to "downlist" the species from endangered to threatened. Experts estimate that would take about 30,000 total nestings in a single year. Based on current trends, Peña says the project could hit that mark by 2012. Read the full story [online](#).

## Other News

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### ***President Bush Extends 100 Percent Pay for Marine Debris Removal***

*Release Date: June 30, 2006*

BILOXI, Miss. -- Federal Coordinator for Gulf Coast Rebuilding Donald Powell today announced that the federal government will continue to pay 100 percent of the cost of marine debris removal from the Mississippi Sound through May 15, 2007. The area eligible for assistance is limited to existing projects in the Mississippi Sound, which runs across some 90 miles of shoreline. The eligible area also includes rivers and tributaries in the southern Mississippi region that is part of the intra-coastal waterway system.

In making the announcement, Powell stated, "The President is strongly committed to rebuilding the Gulf Coast, and debris removal is a key part of this long-term rebuilding effort." The federal government also will continue to pay 100 percent of the cost of all debris removal for five parishes in Louisiana through December 31, 2006, Powell announced.

Mississippi has removed almost 98 percent of its dry debris. Most of the remaining debris is wet debris, including an estimated one million cubic yards in the Sound. Wet debris takes longer to identify, contract and remove-and the state has only recently begun to remove it. Marine debris is being removed by the U.S. Coast Guard under a mission assignment from FEMA. The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources and other agencies are working closely with the Coast Guard to accomplish the removal task. Mississippi has received four extensions of the initial 100 percent federal reimbursement for debris removal.

### ***Louisiana Communities Receive More Than \$29 Million for Public Assistance Projects***

*The funds are part of \$3 Billion in Public Assistance Recovery Funds for Louisiana*

NEW ORLEANS, La. -- The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is providing Public Assistance (PA) funds to several communities to reimburse the state for projects that contribute to the state's recovery after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Grants for the projects listed below total more than \$29

million. "The Gulf Coast was devastated by the worst storm in our history," said Gil Jamieson, deputy director of Gulf Coast Recovery. "We are fully committed in our support of the states as they work to restore their economic and social structures."

To date, FEMA has granted more than \$3 billion in PA funds throughout Louisiana for projects that include debris removal, emergency services, replacement of government buildings, vehicles and equipment and repair or rebuilding of schools, libraries, courthouses, roads and bridges. Funding for these projects goes directly to the state, which disburses the funds to eligible applicants. Jim Stark, director, FEMA Louisiana Transitional Recovery Office said, "FEMA will continue to provide Public Assistance support to the state for public services to help Louisiana's cities and parishes get back to normal."

<b>Recipient</b>	<b>Funding</b>	<b>Description</b>
City of Lake Charles	\$1,645,147	Debris Removal
St. Tammany Parish	\$7,650,000	Debris removal
Plaquemines Parish	\$4,926,337	Debris Removal
Louisiana Office of Emergency Preparedness	\$6,519,411	Emergency Protective Measures (Health & Safety)
Louisiana Department of Agriculture & Forestry	\$1,688,591	Emergency Protective Measures
Louisiana Judicial System	\$1,076,820	Emergency Protective Measures
Plaquemines Parish	\$2,758,807	Emergency Protective Measures
Jefferson Parish Public School System	\$3,125,602	Emergency Protective Measures

## ***Overfishing Among Threats to Ecosystems***

*July 07, 2006 — By Garry Mitchell, Associated Press*

MOBILE, Ala. — For years, millions of people have traveled to summer retreats along the Gulf of Mexico, with many ultimately putting down permanent sandy roots on the coast. One of the problems the population boom has created is overfishing in Gulf waters, which has endangered marine ecosystems and fisheries that are the source of multimillion-dollar recreation and fishing industries. Officials say efforts to rebuild the populations are under way, but many environmentalists accuse the government of lax enforcement of regulations meant to protect against overfishing.

Chris Dorsett of Austin, Texas, director of Gulf of Mexico Fish Conservation for The Ocean Conservancy, said fishery managers in the Gulf and elsewhere have ignored the law and allowed unsustainable fishing for many important fish. "It's time to follow the science and put Gulf fisheries on the road to ecological and economic recovery," he said. "Had they managed our red snapper fishery responsibly our catch levels could be almost three times higher than current levels. We can and must be better stewards of our coastal ecosystem."

Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, federal officials have a mandate to protect fisheries from overfishing, which is defined as the harvesting of fish quicker than they reproduce. Four species in the Gulf of Mexico are still described as being overfished -- greater amberjack, red grouper, red snapper and vermilion snapper. The goal is to end overfishing for red grouper this year, red snapper by 2009 or 2010 and vermilion snapper by 2007.

Susan Buchanan, a spokeswoman for the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, said it takes time to rebuild fish stocks now that an estimated 153 million residents live on the nation's coastlines. "It's not going to happen overnight," she said. "They did become depleted in several decades of overfishing. It

wasn't until about the year 2000 that the rebuilding plan based on the 1996 law became effective."

A study in a recent issue of the journal *Science* says damage to marine ecosystems has accelerated over the past 150-300 years with population growth, luxury resorts and homes and expanded industry. In areas where conservation efforts started in the last century, signs of recovery are apparent, according to the study, which was partly supported by the Lenfest Oceans Program at the Pew Charitable Trusts.

National Geographic's July issue takes an in-depth look at threats to the coasts, illustrating its report with a ghostly two-page photo of Hurricane Katrina's destructive blow to the west end of Dauphin Island off the Alabama coast. Katrina also damaged shrimping grounds and oyster beds in its path. According to the report, the Southeast's coast is the healthiest in the nation despite agricultural runoff and a population growth of 160 percent from 1980 to 2000. The Northeast coast, with its dense population, is in the poorest health, according to the magazine, which relies on data from the Environmental Protection Agency.

In a June report to Congress on the 2005 fisheries, the NOAA said it has made progress in rebuilding overfished stocks and ending overfishing with help from its regional councils. The work continues: The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council -- one of eight regional councils -- is considering additional red snapper regulatory actions, such as commercial and individual fishing quotas and reductions in total allowable catch and bycatch. Nationwide, the NOAA says 54 stocks of specific species and complexes are overfished and 45 stocks and complexes are subject to overfishing. A complex is a grouping of different species that are similar.

Scientists at the Lenfest Oceans Program say most fish resources are in poor shape 10 years after passage of amendments to the Magnuson-Stevens Act, which also requires ailing fish stocks be rebuilt as quickly as possible. But the mandate that overfishing be immediately halted as part of a rebuilding plan has not been met, said Andrew A. Rosenberg at the University of New Hampshire's Ocean Process and Analysis Laboratory. "Congress could strengthen accountability in the law," he said.

## Grant Opportunities

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### ***Gulf of Mexico Alliance Regional Partnership Request for Proposals- Deadline Extended***

The deadline on the Gulf of Mexico Alliance Regional Partnership Projects Funding Announcement has been extended to July 31, 2006. To access the details on the request for proposals, please go to: <http://www.epa.gov/gmpo>.

The Gulf of Mexico Program is announcing the [availability of funding](#) to address activities in the [Gulf of Mexico Alliance](#) Governors' [Action Plan](#) for Healthy and Resilient Coasts. For further information or alternative submission methods contact: Esther Coblentz [Coblentz.esther@epa.gov](mailto:Coblentz.esther@epa.gov) Phone: 228-688-1281

The deadline for submissions is now **July 31, 2006**, 6 pm CST. Proposals should be submitted by electronic mail to [GMP.proposals@epa.gov](mailto:GMP.proposals@epa.gov) or through <http://www.grants.gov>.

**Funding Opportunity Description:** An estimated amount of up to \$3,000,000 for between approximately ten to fifty cooperative agreements may be awarded under this announcement to eligible

applicants for projects that improve the health of the Gulf of Mexico by addressing improved water quality and public health, priority coastal habitat protection/recovery, more effective coastal environmental education, improved habitat identification/characterization data and decision support systems, and strategic nutrient reductions. Projects must actively involve stakeholders and focus on support and implementation of the Gulf of Mexico Alliance Governors' Action Plan for Healthy and Resilient Coasts.

**Eligible Applicants:** State and local governments, interstate agencies, tribes, colleges and universities, individuals, and other public or nonprofit organizations. EPA will require nonprofit organizations selected for funding to provide verification of their nonprofit status prior to the grant award.

**Matching Requirements:** There is no matching requirement; however, the extent of partnerships and leveraged funding will be considered by reviewers during the evaluation process.

## ***Gulf of Mexico Community-based Restoration Partnership Request for Preproposals***

The Gulf of Mexico Community-based Restoration Partnership (GCRP) invites preproposals for its citizen-driven habitat restoration projects. The partnership is seeking to fund on-the-ground activities throughout the Gulf of Mexico and the U.S. Territories of the Caribbean which restore marine, estuarine, and riparian habitats benefiting living marine resources and provide educational and social benefits by significantly involving the community.

The GCRP is a multi-year, regional partnership between the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Community-based Restoration Program (CRP), the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) Gulf of Mexico Program - Gulf Ecological Management Sites (GEMS) Initiative, and the Gulf states and Caribbean territories. The purpose of this partnership is to strengthen the conservation efforts of the CRP and GEMS by supporting on-the-ground restoration activities and fostering local stewardship of ecologically significant areas.

Preproposals will be evaluated and selected by the GCRP steering committee, which consists of Gulf of Mexico Foundation staff, NOAA, US EPA Gulf of Mexico Program, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and other natural resource agency technical staff. Approximately \$280,000 is available for Year 2007 projects. Project funding levels will typically fall within the range of \$20,000 - \$50,000. The Partnership seeks to provide approximately \$40,000 to each state or territory assuming projects meeting the selection criteria are identified. All projects must provide a 1:1 match of the grant amount. Matching funds cannot be federal dollars.

Preproposals must be received by **July 24, 2006** and should be no more than two (2) pages in length. Preproposals must include all of the information requested and be formatted as shown in Attachment A. Projects that meet the minimum partnership requirements will be invited to submit full proposals (approximate submittal date: September 25, 2006) that will more fully describe the activities to be accomplished and will include a specific timeline, a monitoring plan, and a detailed budget. More information is available at [http://gulfmex.org/documents/y6/gcrp\\_rfpref.doc](http://gulfmex.org/documents/y6/gcrp_rfpref.doc).



## **NOAA's Marine Debris Grant Initiative**

In fiscal year 2007, the NOAA Marine Debris Program (MDP) grant initiative will continue to address the adverse impacts of marine debris and build community support for debris prevention. This initiative will provide funding for locally-driven marine debris prevention and removal projects. These community-based projects will benefit coastal habitat such as wetlands and coral reefs, along with waterways, fisheries, and marine mammals and sea turtles. Projects funded through the MDP grants initiative should have strong on-the-ground components to remove marine debris and derelict fishing gear as well as strong community education components to help prevent future marine debris accumulation.

### **How to Apply**

Proposals for marine debris removal and prevention projects are accepted and competitively awarded by NOAA's MDP. Awards will typically range from \$15,000 - \$150,000; NOAA will not accept proposals for under \$15,000 or more than \$250,000. Organizations whose projects have the potential to benefit living marine resources are eligible to apply. More information on this funding opportunity can be found at [http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration/funding\\_opportunities/funding.html](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration/funding_opportunities/funding.html) or on [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) by searching the Federal Funding Opportunity number NMFS-HCPO-2007-2000731.

### **Program Details**

**Typical Award Size:** \$15,000 to \$150,000

**Match:** 1:1 match is encouraged

**Funding Duration:** Up to 18 months

**Eligibility:** Academic institutions, commercial organizations, non-profits, and state, local and tribal governments

**Due Date:** October 30, 2006

## **Energy**

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### **U.S. House Votes to Lift Offshore Oil Drilling Ban**

*Bill offers states that allow drilling billions of dollars*

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WASHINGTON, DC, June 30, 2006 (ENS) - The U.S. House of Representatives approved legislation Thursday that lifts a 25 year ban on oil and natural gas drilling off most of the Pacific and Atlantic coasts and the eastern part of the Gulf of Mexico. The legislation, which passed by a vote of 232-187, controversially offers states billions of dollars in federal revenues if they allow drilling off their coasts. Proponents said the measure is needed to boost domestic supplies of oil and natural gas and to revise an outdated ban on drilling in much of the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS).

The federal moratorium was based on "the false notion that energy production and environmental protection were mutually exclusive," said House Resources Committee Chairman Richard Pombo, a California Republican and co-author of the bill. "The now universally accepted truth is that we can, and must, have both. This bill will finally bring federal policy in line with reality." The legislation specifically removes all leasing bans beyond 100 miles and permits leasing 50 to 100 miles offshore unless states protest. It bans all oil and gas drilling within 50 miles of state coasts unless states chose otherwise. "This bill is not a perfect bill," said Representative Adam Putnam, a Florida Republican. "But it gives Florida

protections she does not now enjoy. It gives Floridians control over Florida's coasts." Read the rest of this article online at [Environment News Service](#).

## ***Louisiana Governor Objects to OCS Lease Sale***

*CSO Weekly Report June 30, 2006*

Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco has expressed her objections to the August sale of federal leases for oil and gas exploration off Louisiana's coast. Governor Blanco is attempting to block the federal government's lease sales as part of her push for Louisiana to get a more of a portion of federal oil and gas royalties to restore barrier islands and other coastal areas. Governor Blanco wrote a letter to the Minerals Management Service outlining her disappointment in the Environmental Assessment for the Western Gulf Lease Sale 200's ability to address the needs of the state. The letter objects to the lease sale on the basis that it is not consistent with the state's coastal zone management program. The letter calls into question the lack of consideration of the impacts of hurricanes Katrina and Rita on the coastal landscape and the diminished ability to sustain onshore support for leases in the Gulf of Mexico in the Environmental Assessment. For oil and gas produced between three miles and six miles off Louisiana's shore, the state gets 27 percent of the federal government's share of the royalties. Beyond six miles the state gets nothing. The governor is willing to settle for an investment by the federal government in protecting and restoring the coastal environment. The Minerals Management Service has 15 days to respond to the letter. In addition, the state has hired a law firm to prepare for a legal fight to continue to block the lease sale. To view Governor Blanco's letter and MMS's response visit

<http://www.gov.state.la.us/index.cfm?md=newsroom&tmp=detail&articleID=1996>.

## ***Governor's Office Statement on Discussions with the U.S. Minerals Management Service***

*June 26, 2006*

Governor Blanco has received a letter from the Minerals Management Service (MMS) of the U.S. Department of Interior in response to her June 14, 2006 letter to the agency in which she objected to the upcoming Western Gulf oil and gas lease sale. The letter outlined the reasons the proposed Lease Sale 200 is inconsistent with Louisiana's coastal resources program. The MMS letter in response states that the agency believes the proposed Lease Sale 200 is consistent with the policies of Louisiana and offers to meet to review the governor's letter of objection and address the state's concerns. (see [letter from MMS](#) dated June 21, 2006).

The governor has directed the Department of Natural Resources confirm with MMS that the purpose of the meeting would be to discuss specific measures proposed by the state in the governor's 25-page letter of objection. (see [letter to MMS](#) dated June 22, 2006). At the direction of the governor, the state will continue to communicate with the Federal government on this matter.

## ***Draft Environmental Impact Statement on Calhoun LNG Project***

FERC staff prepared a draft environmental impact statement for the Calhoun LNG, L.P. and Point Comfort Pipeline Company, L.P. (collectively referred to as Calhoun Point Comfort) Calhoun LNG Project. FERC's environmental staff concludes that Calhoun Point Comfort's Calhoun LNG Project with appropriate mitigating measures, as recommended, would have limited adverse environmental impact.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; U.S. Coast Guard; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; and the U.S. Department of Transportation are cooperated in the preparation of the draft EIS. Read the full press release and EIS [here](#).

## Training and Conferences

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### ***Alabama Mississippi Bays and Bayous Symposium- Register Online***

*Nov 28-29, 2006 - Mobile, AL*

The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program in Partnership with Mississippi - Alabama Sea Grant and the Alabama Center for Estuarine Studies invites you to join them in the historic city of Mobile, Alabama for a multi-disciplinary gathering Nov 28-29, 2006 to share information on the status of the Northern Gulf. Topics for the [Alabama Mississippi Bays and Bayous Symposium](#) include water quality, living resources, habitat restoration, natural hazards and coastal development.

A highlight of the two day event will be Dr. Sylvia Earle who will kick-off the program Tuesday morning discussing the impact humans have on the world ocean. Dr. Earle—sometimes known as "Her Royal Deepness" or the "Sturgeon General"—has been an Explorer-in-Residence at the National Geographic Society since 1998, the year Time magazine named her their first "hero for the planet."

Hosted by the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, Mississippi Alabama Sea Grant Consortium, and the Alabama Center for Estuarine Studies, the three groups hope to attract applied scientists, resource managers, and the general public in four informative sessions on current issues. Organizers hope the dialog between these groups will increase the knowledge and awareness coastal problems facing the northern Gulf. Topics include concurrent sessions on water quality and living resources followed by habitat management and natural hazards / coastal development.

Noted Duke University coastal geomorphologist, Dr. Orrin Pilkey, will stir up the audience for the Tuesday evening social. Dr. Pilkey is known for his candor when speaking regarding his life's work on barrier islands, beach processes, and development. Other noted presenters are Dr. Nancy Rabalais, Louisiana University Marine Consortium, discussing Gulf hypoxia and Dr. Frank Muller-Karger, University of South Florida, presenting on our national ocean policy.

For more information, contact: [ambbs@mobilebaynep.com](mailto:ambbs@mobilebaynep.com) 251-431-6409 or 251-438-5690. [Click here to download event flyer \(PDF document\)](#). Abstract Submission and registration now available online at <http://ambbs.mobilebaynep.com>.

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